

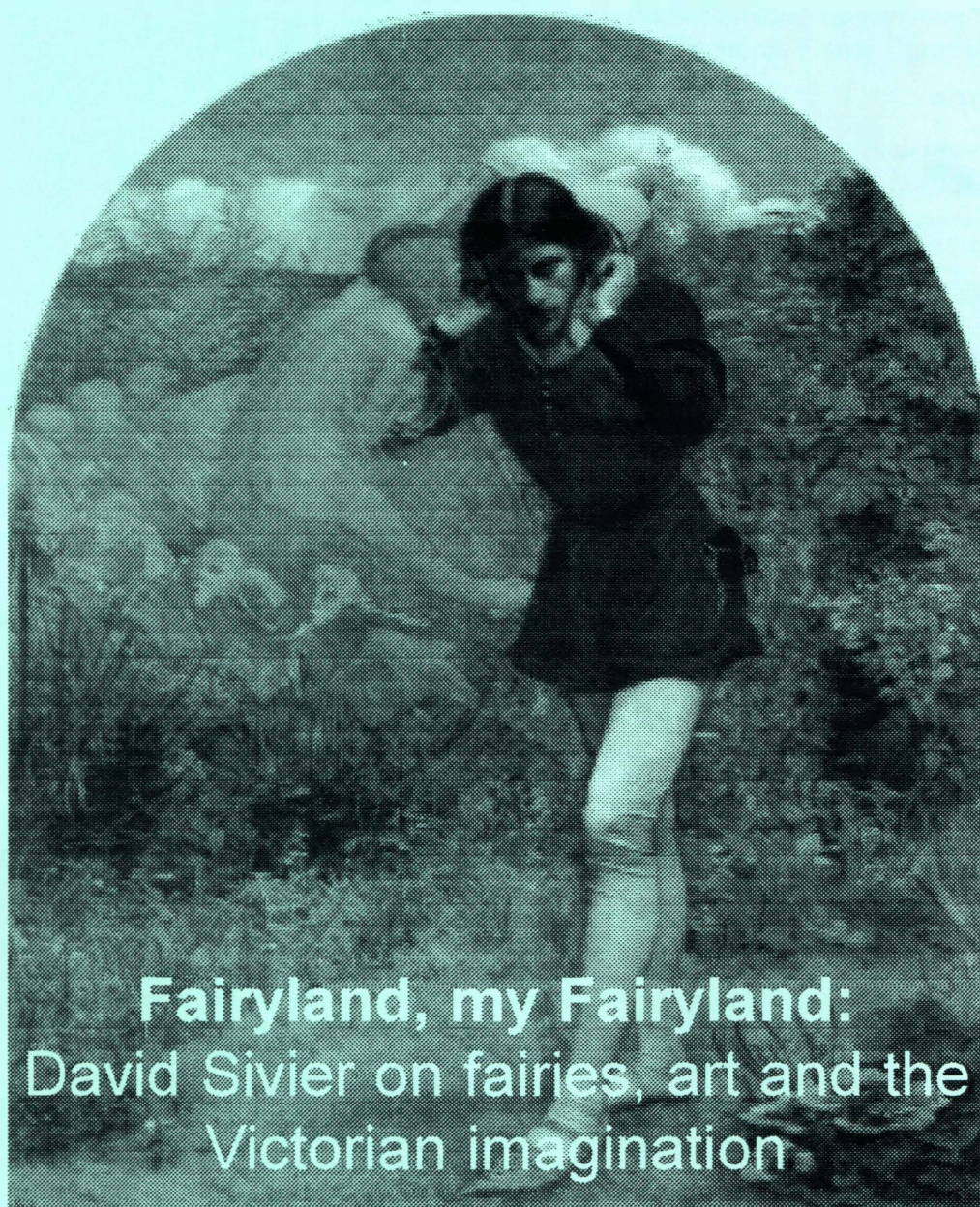
Magonia

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Interpreting Contemporary Vision and Belief



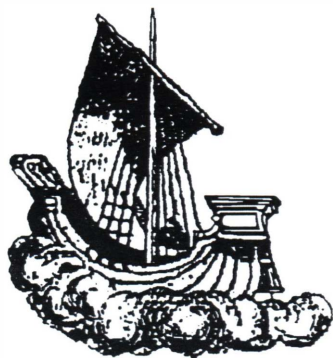
Fairyland, my Fairyland:
David Sivier on fairies, art and the
Victorian imagination

Extraordinary claims demand extraordinary proof; but what,

Gareth Medway asks, makes an extraordinary claim?

Montague Keene challenges Chris French's sceptical views, but his own views on the Scole controversy come under fire from **Peter Rogerson**.

Plus: The Pelican puzzles about police chases;
Readers' Letters; Book Reviews; Back Page



MAGONIA 71
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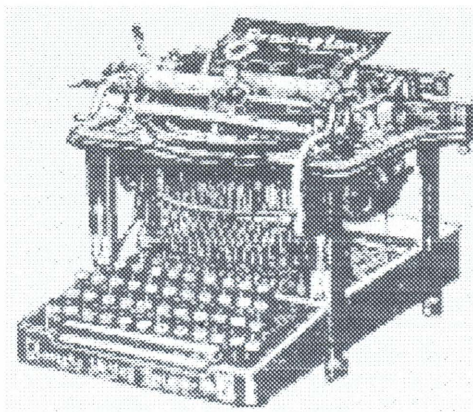
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Editorial Notes

Another curious example of 'Virtual Experience' has come my way. You'll remember we've previously published details of a few of these 'paranormal' experiences in which people have discovered that a situation they believed to be completely real was in fact a fantasy. I'm particularly interested in those which are almost content-free, with none of the traditional elements of ghosts, abductions, other lives, etc., so there is no particular motivation to believe their 'reality'. Whereas people are inclined to defend emotionally their sighting of the late Great Aunt Agatha, who's going to get worked up about a concrete driveway that never was? (1)

The latest story to come my way has a rather more dramatic narrative than the 'virtual banality' I've written about before, but the content proves to be so absurd that the percipient readily accepts its unreality - but there is a curious twist in the tale.

A colleague at work is, like me, the librarian at a suburban public library. A few weeks ago she was woken in the middle of the night by a phone call from the security officer at the local council offices:

"People have invaded the main street here and are rioting. It's all under control, but we're just ringing to let you know what's happening." "What a pointless phone call", thought my friend, and went back to sleep. Not for long though, as another call came through:

"They're moving off in the direction of your library. But it's OK, you don't need to do anything, we've got it all in hand."

Now awake she went downstairs to the bathroom. Then made herself a cold drink and sat and drank some of it before going back to bed and falling asleep again.

When she woke in the morning there'd been no more phone calls, but she did notice the bedside phone was displaced, so she dialled 1471 to get details of the last incoming call. This proved to be a call from early the

previous evening which she remembers receiving. The unexpected twist to this story is that when she got downstairs in the morning, there on the table was the unfinished drink that she had remembered making during one of the presumably fantasy episodes! Needless to say, on arriving at work she found there had been no 'invasion' or any other security problem.

So which part of this curious episode was 'real', which 'fantasy'. The making of the drink *had* happened, but had it happened as she remembered it? Had she actually got out of bed at all? Had the drink been left over from the previous evening, forgotten about, then incorporated into the dream episode? She is sure none of this was the case.

So the likeliest explanation is that the whole experience is a fantasy, and the experient, in a somnambulistic state, got out of bed at some time during the night, went downstairs and made a drink. But is her 'memory' of this episode an actual memory of her physical actions at the time or a separate dream episode which matches the 'physical evidence' only in retrospect?

If this sort of complex virtual experience can happen to someone in an unstressed situation - the library where she works is not in an area which experiences trouble from gangs of youths, for instance - a circumstance which might have given cause to fears of 'invasion' - how much more impenetrable are the mechanisms which produce an abduction report from a confused and vulnerable person. And if even a comparatively simple narrative can raise so many questions, how much more open to doubt and debate are the complex and confused tales of abductions? And how much of the 'physical evidence' in these cases could have been produced by the same processes which led to the strange episode of my colleague's abandoned drink?

(1) John Rimmer, 'Virtual Banality', *Magonia* 48, January 1994, p.13

The Limners of Faerie



Above and cover:
Millais's *Ferdinand
Lured by Ariel*.

David Sivier

This article was submitted as an entry for the second Roger Sandell Memorial Essay Competition

SINCE THE dawn of the New Ufology in Keel's *Operation Trojan Horse* and Vallee's *Passport to Magonia*, the equation between the humanoid of the flying saucers and the elves of folk-

lore has become something of a truism. So accepted is it that the Fortean Times's long-running cartoonist, Hunt Emerson, could mischievously suggest in his Phenomenonix strip that the ufonauts were indeed really fairies, flying about in fake spaceships in order to avoid the humiliation of dressing up in butterfly wings and gossamer as part of their repertoire of haunting, without drawing upon himself the wrath of angry readers outraged at having a cherished belief mocked. (1) The similarities between the UFO phenomenon and the European, and even extra-European, fairy cult is so strong, especially in the subtexts of sexuality, abduction, rape, and the substitution of otherworldly changelings for human babies, that this magazine's own Peter Rogerson entitled his revisionist history of abductions, beginning in issue 46, "Fairyland's Hunters". After Keel and Vallee, many, though not all books on ufology examine the connection between the Wee Folk of tradition and their high-technological cousins. The relationship between the two is

increasingly examined from the other side as well, as recent books on fairy lore, such as Janet Bord's *Fairies - Real Encounters with Little People*, (2) also include chapters examining the strange links to the ufonauts. Outside ufology, the European fairy cult is of increasing interest to historians researching the European witch craze. In the view of scholars such as Gustav Henningsen, the fairy cult, as deformed by inquisitorial demonology, supplied the ecstatic experiences and imagery at the heart of European witchcraft. (3) In view of these strong links to a variety of Fortean phenomena, it is worth examining the fairy cult itself, as propagated and amended by the Victorians.

While folk belief about the "Good People" had provided artists, musicians and poets with inspiration and raw material for a variety of works ranging from bucolic idyll to political metaphor since before Shakespeare and Spenser, it was during the Victorian era that fairy lore exploded across the arts in the form recognisable to modern audiences. It was the Victorians, for example, who produced the classic image of the fairy as an ethereal being graced with butterfly wings. Diminutive height had been an established fairy trait in most, but not all, European traditions since the Middle Ages, but they lacked the characteristic wings, instead flying through the aid of spells. This changed under the Victorians and in a process similar to that whereby the angels became graced with their astral pinions, the Wee

Folk acquired the insectile airfoils they've sported ever since. Another powerful, though less tangible, link to the modern fairy cult is the background of the most notable advocate of the Cottingley fairy photographs, Conan Doyle. While it's recognised that Conan Doyle's interest in the photographs arose from his Spiritualist beliefs, few commentators have remarked upon the strange continuity they added to his family history. Both Conan Doyle's father, Charles Altamont Doyle, and his uncle, Richard "Dick" Doyle, were accomplished and noted painters of fairy scenes. Doyle himself may have created a surrogate father figure of super-rationality in Sherlock Holmes to compensate for his own father's madness, yet nevertheless Doyle pere seems to have bequeathed to his son an interest in the occult and mystical which clouded his judgement on that particular case. It's especially remarkable that the alleged fairies, which even before the confession of one of the sisters to an awful lot of people, appeared to be cardboard cut-outs from a book went unrecognised as such by Doyle. It was his beliefs, not artistic discrimination, which seem to have been passed down the family line. As for the reality of the fairies themselves, like the *X-Files*'s Mulder, Doyle wanted to believe. The result was controversy and ridicule.

The greatest achievement of the Victorians in the realm of fairy lore was simply its preservation and transmission to succeeding generations, in what-



ever form, during the industrial revolution. As industrialisation and mechanisation gathered pace, the old English agrarian traditions gradually withered as the populations which had previously supported them moved into the expanding towns. It was against this background of urbanisation that the Victorian folklorists moved in their efforts to preserve what they saw as valuable remnants of the old traditions. Especially influential among the books of fairy lore of the period were Crofton Croker's *Fairy Legends and Traditions of the South of Ireland*, 1826, whose illustrations by Daniel Maclise effectively launched that artist's career. Thomas Keightley's *Fairy Mythology* of 1828, Mrs Bray's *Legends from the Borders of the Tamar and Tavey*, and the Fairy books of Andrew Lang. Beginning with the *Blue Fairy Book* of 1889, Lang's books re-established the popularity of fairy stories after they had largely been supplanted in popularity by stories of contemporary children's lives and adventures, such as those by Juliana H. Ewing and Mrs Molesworth, and continued in print in

various forms until the 1920s, long after the heyday of the Victorian fairy cult. These fairy books, much sought after today by collectors, also show the strong links between children's books and the wider artistic milieu. The principal illustrator of the books, Henry J. Ford, was a friend of Edward Burne-Jones, and there is a marked Pre-Raphaelite influence to his illustrations. Like the famous works of the Brotherhood, his colour plates for the books boast vivid, rosy colours, and all his illustrations are strongly detailed, with the "dream-like air of fantasy which pervades much of [Burne-Jones's] work". (4) Without the renewed interest in folklore and faery engendered by Romanticism, what little British fairy lore would remain after the industrial revolution would be confined largely to the works of Shakespeare, Spenser, and 17th-century authors like Sir Simeon Steward's *Description of the King and Queen of Fayrie, their Habit, Fayre, their Abode, Pompe and State* of 1633, and Robert Kirk's *The Secret Commonwealth*, and so of interest primarily to students of literature and history, without any

Edward Burne-Jones

apparent relevance beyond these disciplines. Aside from the pleasure of the stories themselves, the sources for popular historical and Fortean research would have been greatly impoverished.

Ford's relationship with Burne-Jones and the Pre-Raphaelites links him, and fairy painting, to the larger world of continental Symbolism. Fernand Khnopff, the Dutch Symbolist who sported a suitably Decadent amorous fascination with his sister, was strongly influenced by Burne-Jones. It was the Romantics who had first developed the notion of the artist as a rebel against the stifling strictures of society. This alienation became acute when combined with the morbid cast of mind characteristic of Symbolism. "Symbolism was a way of saying 'no' to a number of things which were contemporary with itself. In particular, it was a reaction not only against moralism and rationalism but also against the crass materialism which prevailed in the 1880s." (5) Symbolist art celebrated the sublime dream, the fantastic, the mystical and, occasionally, the horrific, against banal reality. It was a line of escape for aesthetes into other, different, mystical worlds, and a number of the most prominent Symbolists had strong mystical beliefs. Burne-Jones had read theology at Oxford, while the Salon Rose+Croix and the Nabis, prominent French Symbolist groups, had strong links to the demimonde of occultism and magic. All of these tendencies are exemplified in miniature in the Victorian fairy cult.

As with later continental Symbolism, the British Victorian fairy cult was predominantly a "reaction against the prevailing utilitarianism of the times. It was a celebration of magic in a period predominantly concerned with establishing facts". (6) Darwinism and the rise of materialist science and psychology cast doubts on traditional religious certitudes, at a time when the landscape itself was changing under the impact of

mechanisation. Factories and mills sprang up, embodying the new scientism and rationalism of the age. The result was an acute sense of the "loss of an indefinable quality which they had found in the former cultural system, in the values and meanings signified by what we might call its 'emblematic order'". (7) As Andrew Lang put it, describing the childhood reading which eventually led to the publication of his books: "I read every fairy tale I could lay my hands on, and knew all the fairies in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and all the ghosts in Sir Walter Scott, and I hated machinery of every description." (8) This Romantic revolt was not confined merely to fairies. Gothic Horror forms an important part of it, especially as a studied medievalism also informs Victorian painting. All aspects of the supernatural received a new impetus as part of the Romantic convulsion, including vampires. Dr John Polidori's tale, *The Vampyre*, anonymously published in 1819 and popularly attributed to his patient, Byron, was translated into French and German, and adapted several times for the stage, most notably in James Robinson's Planche's *The Vampire; or the Bride of the Isles*, first performed at the English Opera House in August 1820. By 1824 one French critic complained that the reading public was assailed by vampires from every side. Polidori's grisly tale formed the basis for James Malcolm Rymer's epic *Varney the Vampire*, "without a doubt the best-known of all 'penny dreadfuls', after *Sweeney Todd*, and the most successful vampire tale until Bram Stoker's *Dracula*". (9) The trend towards supernatural fantasy penetrated the world of ballet, which had been intimately bound up with the elfin since its ancestry in the Stuart masque. In the 1820s the heavy costumes and high heels of the 18th-century stage were abandoned in favour of gauzy dresses and silk tights. Dancing on points first appeared in 1821, and themes were increasingly taken from legend and fairy tale, such as *La Sylphide* and *Giselle*, first performed in 1832 and 1841 respectively. Maria Mercandotti, the 1820s child star, was acclaimed as a "divine little fairy sprite", and Marie Taglioni, who played the leading role in *La Sylphide*, was described as having a "sylph-like

airiness scarcely palpable to human touch". Musicians composed, performed and published innumerable pieces of fairy music. On stage and in art, the favourite subject of the genre, par excellence, was Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Theatrical productions of these became increasingly lavish and spectacular as the century wore on and increasingly impressive stage effects were developed to keep audiences spell-bound. Charles Kean's 1856 production of the play was so successful it ran for 150 nights. It's been rightly said that modern science fiction has superseded the fairy tale as the fantasy form of the 20th century. Aliens and robots have replaced previous centuries' elves, ogres and goblins as objects of fear and wonder. Given this literary development, it may be truly said that the 19th-century Shakespearean plays were the Victorian version of big budget SF blockbusters like *Star Wars*. A tone of atavism seems to be creeping back into the cinema, however. The Cottingley Fairies have formed the basis for one 90s film, and a cinematic adaptation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is promised from the autumn. After the technological excesses of this century, fantasy is turning back to its folkloric roots.

Much has been made of the debt that George Lucas owed to Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* in delineating the mythic archetypes around which he crafted *Star Wars* characters, but this urge to discern common mythological types has never been confined solely to sophisticated 20th-century post-moderns. Fuseli, best known for his eerie and disquieting painting *The Nightmare*, made clear the strong parallels between Classical mythology and the fairy faith in his lectures at the Royal Academy. "Scylla & the portress of Hell, their Daemons & our spectres, the shade of Patroclus & the ghost of Hamlet, their furies & our witches, differ less in essence than in local, temporary, social modification; their common origin was fancy . . . & the curiosity implanted in us of divining into the invisible." (10) It is a lesson that contemporary SF cineastes have learned well.

Outside of the academics, the Victorian fairy cult represented a democratisation of the fantastic in line with the values

and attitudes of the new industrial bourgeoisie. In many ways it was a peculiarly British phenomenon. While the German Romantics collected edifying Marchen and wrote poetry about the Lorelei and Kobolde, depicted on canvas by artists such as Moritz Von Schwind, the genre was far less represented in France than in England. England's medieval heritage had survived better than across the channel. Although the Gothic revival was certainly not confined to England, and its greatest British exponent, Augustus Pugin, was an ardent admirer of continental Catholicism, the "insular spirit of the 19th century inspired an image of fairyland in art as an ideal world which existed somewhere in the heart of the British countryside". (11) This, however, did not rule out continental influences. Prince Albert introduced the British public to the art of the German Nazarenos, an intensely Romantic movement infused with nature mysticism whose exact depiction of nature and medievalism also influenced the Pre-Raphaelites. The fairy painters shared this devotion to nature, and their works thus form a fantasticated part of the Romantic landscape tradition. Patriotism played a strong part in promoting the genre, and artistic patrons took a delight in purchasing works based on Shakespeare and other great, national authors. At the same time, the genre's subject matter had a broader, more popular appeal than the traditional subject matter of classical mythology favoured by the aristocracy. It could be readily understood by the new, self-made men of industry, who may not have shared the cultivated backgrounds of the landed gentry.

The genre was also well suited to Victorian notions of domesticity. As "Home Sweet Home" became the quintessential celebration of domestic bliss, and Austrian Biedermeier artists turned to painting the solid values of the home, British fairy artists began portraying the fairy lifestyle as their celebration of homely virtues. The metamorphosis from savage nature spirits to the twee sprites of Victorian fancy was the artistic counterpart of the taming of the wild, natural world by industry and human rationality.

This democratisation of the fantastic was given a strong impetus by the vast increase in

literacy and improvements in printing technology in the 1830s and 40s. The new steam presses and machine manufactured paper meant that quarto and folio magazines could be produced at a price which the new industrial working class could afford. Although priced at a penny, these new magazines were hardly cheap, costing about a hundredth of the average weekly wage. There was thus intense competition to produce literature which would appeal to the masses. By and large they favoured tales of the gruesome and fantastic as a means of escape from the gruesome realities of their own existence. The result was a plethora of tales of Gothic Horror amongst the early penny dreadfuls, though by the 1840s they had been largely superseded by equally grim tales about real criminals, especially highwaymen. In contrast to this, fairy art seems to have survived a little longer, until the 1870s, while the fairy tale itself is still with us, although now mainly the preserve of children's stories. In its adult form, vestiges of the fairy cult lingered on until finally slain by the carnage of the First World War. The reasons for this persistence against the demise of other types of fantastic and supernatural literature are convoluted and instructive.

Firstly, Vampire fiction in the form of the dreadfuls was low-cost, ephemeral sensationalism. Although Varney's influence proved enduring and pervasive, during the 1840s the arena of action in the dreadfuls expanded into more contemporary settings. Grisly tales of true crime, and then stirring tales of adventure in the American West and the Empire provided fresh opportunities for escapist entertainment. There was also a conscious decision by many "dreadful" publishers to take their products upmarket and make them more acceptable to a family readership. Thus, although magazines like *The Calendar of Horror* and *Terrific Tales* continued into the 1840s, there also appeared lines of boys' stories, intended to provide good, wholesome fun for the young audience at which they were aimed. Although initially only slightly less gruesome than the horror and crime stories they replaced, these gradually improved until they reflected the values and aggressive patriotism of the more respectable members of society, as

1. *Fortean Times*, No. 71, October/November 1993, p. 21

2. Bord, J., *Fairies - Real Encounters with Little People*, Michael O'Mara, 1997, as reviewed by Mark Pilkington in *Magonia*, No. 60, August 1997, p. 17

3. Henningsen, G., "The Ladies from Outside": An Archaic Pattern of the Witches' Sabbath, in Henningsen, G., and Ankarloo, B., *Early Modern European Witchcraft Centres and Peripheries*, Clarendon, 1990, pp. 191-215

4. Dalby, R., 'Andrew Lang's Fairy Books', in *Book and Magazine Collector*, No. 81, December 1990, p. 61

5. Lucie-Smith, E., *Symbolist Art*, Thames and Hudson, 1972, p. 54

6. Philpotts, B., *Fairy Painting*, Ash and Grant, 1978, p. 4

7. Gibson, M., *Symbolism*, Taschen, 1995, p. 17

8. Dalby, op. cit., p. 58

9. Anglo, M., *Penny Dreadfuls and other Victorian Horrors*, Jupiter, 1977, p. 15

10. Philpotts, op. cit., p. 5

11. Philpotts, *ibid.*, p. 4



Violence and cruelty were evident in many Victorian paintings and tales, especially Christina Rossetti's *Goblin Market*.

had already invested Queen Mab with the characteristics of the classical Diana and Venus by transforming her into Titania, and the Victorians continued this classicising process. Paradoxically, while the eroticism in most vampire fiction of the period remained largely suggested, overt eroticism is apparent in the vast majority of 19th-century fairy paintings, which show naked or near naked fairies engaged in amorous adventure. The painters of such pieces were saved from censure, mostly, because of the respectable nature of the genre as a whole. Like scenes from classical antiquity, nudity was permitted while it would have been scandalous in more contemporary settings. Fairies thus provided an acceptable outlet for repressed Victorian sexuality.

They were also far more suitable for children, suitably clad, of course. Reduced to the level of ants and insects, their adventures had a comic and mock-heroic quality, although violence and cruelty were evident in many Victorian paintings and tales, especially Christina Rossetti's *Goblin Market*. The heroes of many tradi-

expressed in tales like *Jack Harkaway in the Transvaal*. The darkness and socially subversive nature of Vampire fiction, whose heroes serve as "a measure of hostility to all authority" (12) made the subject entirely unsuitable as children's literature, leaving the field to be explored by horror writers like Le Fanu and poets maudits like Charles Baudelaire. Fairies, however, were eminently suitable subject matter for children and adults alike. Shakespeare

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fore, that songs by the Goth band Bauhaus included "Hollow Hills", about fairies and "Bela Lugosi's Dead", about the most celebrated portrayer of Dracula on screen and stage before Christopher Lee. Vampires and fairies have a perennial appeal to an overlapping audience.

The genre and subject also has a more mystical appeal to modern, disenchanted youth. The new Romanticism of the late 20th century has bred a dissatisfaction with consensus reality as defined by the political and scientific establishment. Science fiction articulates fears about science, as much as the desire for technological progress, and there is a strong element of the mystical, even Fortean, in much popular SF. Greg Bear's fantasy, *The Infinity Concerto*, took its name from the piece of avant-garde music mentioned in the works of Fort as having deprived a number of composers of their ability to write music after hearing it performed. In the hands of Bear, it became the sole weapon of the human prisoners of Sidhedark against their Fairy captors. The popular comics writer Alan Grant in an interview with the fanzine *Dog Breath* cited "anything to do with UFOs, alien abductions, New World Order conspiracies, lost civilisations, apocalyptic visions, prophecies and the human mind" (14) as some of his favourite personal reading. 2000 AD's long running strip, *Slaine*, drew extensively on Celtic legend, including elements of modern Wicca and Theosophy in its portrayal of a science fictional, antediluvian Britain. Mills, the writer of that particular epic, stated in an introduction to the strip that he deliberately gave the domain of the alien villains the name of the Welsh Celtic hell, Cythrawl, and based the diluvial servitor race on one of Blavatsky's Root Races. The fairies took the form of malign and benign extradimensionals. The strip articulated powerful ecofeminist sentiments, and I've personally come across a number of people who have developed an interest in Wicca and modern occultism through reading it. Mills has himself said that one of the things he set out to do in the strip was "to try and correct . . . the insidious lies most of us are still taught about our ancestors . . . you know, the crap about them being woad-covered savages brought

the wonderful benefits of "civilisation" by the stern-but-fair proto-Thatcherite Romans with their central heating and their straight roads where the chariots ran on time". (15) Although far from the bucolic, classicised fantasies of "merrie England" characteristic of Victorian art, the strip nevertheless shares its urge to depict fairyland as a mystical, British ideal world, though in the case of Mills one darkened by real barbarism and violence. It also demonstrates the enormous appeal for an indigenous British mystical tradition separate from classical myth and Christian mysticism. Classical mythology has largely fallen out of favour, although Roman epics still possess a certain popularity on stage and screen. Elements of Christian religious lore, such as angels and the Devil, may permeate low culture such as comics, but the central tenets of the faith itself do not lend themselves to the type of violent entertainment required in modern fantasy. Many Christians would also be unhappy with the portrayal of Christ and the apostles in works of entertainment, while others would no doubt object to the pious didacticism of overtly religious works, at least in certain fields like the comic strip. In postchristian, secular Britain fairyland provides an accessible mystical elsewhere known and recognised to most Britons which can be adapted to serve particular narrative or political roles without incurring the vicious controversy attached to religious debate. The same psychological processes which favoured the democratisation of fairy art in the 19th century show themselves equally powerful in the 20th. In postchristian, secular Britain fairyland provides an accessible mystical elsewhere known and recognised to most Britons which can be adapted to serve particular narrative or political roles without incurring the vicious controversy attached to religious debate. The same psychological processes which favoured the democratisation of fairy art in the 19th century show themselves equally powerful in the 20th.

It is also perfectly suited to the post-psychedelic exploration of the human subconscious. Fairy art celebrated the sublime dream, expressed in images of Titania sleeping, guarded and watched by Oberon and his armoured retinue, or charging across the brows of

recumbent mortals. Fuseli, the Principal Hobgoblin Painter to the Devil, was supposed to eat raw beef at night to give him the strange, otherworldly dreams which provided the raw material for his work. In Surrealism, which also explores the dream and subconscious, painters like Max Walter Svanberg continued to paint fairy ladies not so far removed from their Symbolist predecessors. More technological artists, such as Jurgen Ziewe, use computer graphics and Virtual Reality to create the "paradises artificiels" of which the Decadents dreamed. Ziewe's art is also informed by Theosophical and mystical beliefs, and his works can therefore be seen as a technological version of the otherworld desired by the fairy painters. Finally, there are the machine elves encountered by Terence McKenna and other explorers of psychedelia in the hallucinogenic world of DMT. Many of the hippies consciously modelled themselves on their forebears in Surrealism and 19th-century Romanticism, citing Thomas De Quincy and the Club de Haschichins as illustrious predecessors. Fairyland, whether portrayed by dreamy Romantics or the tortured aesthetes of the Ecole Symboliste, offers the attractive prospect of personally encountering the strange inhabitants of the human neurological landscape. In the hands of underground comic artists such as Pete Loveday, the relocation of fairyland to the interior of the human psyche, accessible primarily through drugs, is complete. (16) Tellingly, Millais's *Ferdinand Lured by Ariel* (see cover illustration) was rejected by the dealer who commissioned it because of strong reservations over the green colour of the fairies depicted. Was this simply disquiet at a convention of naturalistic fairy pigmentation being broken, or fear that the picture was a reference to the "green fairy" of absinthe, the sinful drink of Baudelaire and the poets maudits?

The desire to escape from this world to a parallel universe of fantasy and delight is constant and pervasive, especially in times of radical change. Fairyland is the quintessential "Land of Heart's Desire", the pleasures of which can be terrible. SF has been described as the literature of change, and so has taken over the role, and frequently the subject

12. Ryan, J.S., 'The Vampire Before and After Stoker's Dracula', reviewing Senf, C.A., *The Vampire in 19th Century Literature*, in *Contemporary Legend*, Vol. 3, 1993, p. 151

13. Philpotts, op. cit., p. 4

14. Kear, B.A., Dr., ed., *Dog Breath*, No. 3, p. 6

15. Mills, P. and Fabry, G., introduction to *Slaine the King*, *Special Edition*, Titan Books, 1987

16. See especially the chapter "An Error of Judgement" in Russell's *Big Strip Stupormarket*, John Brown Publishing, 1995

matter, of traditional fairy stories, while modern technology tantalisingly offers the possibility of giving these fantasies concrete form. All these modern, technological fears and fantasies were first articulated through fairyland by the Victorians as they entered the first industrial age. Now, with the disruption of the second, fairyland in its traditional guise and in the technological trappings of aliens and androids, is reaffirming its hold on the human psyche, as expressed in the imagery and themes of otherworld experiences. The Cottingley fairies and subsequent elfin encounters drew extensively on Victorian fairy iconography, as ultimately does much of the Close Encounter phenomenon. As more traditional fairy narratives once again find popularity, perhaps we shall see a resurgence in fairy encounters closer to the Victorian source material, or at least the imagery of the tradition's modern interpreters. Regardless of the precise form, the power of the fairies to shape our modern myths is by no means exhausted. It is perhaps the strongest and least recognised of the Victorians' contribution to the human imagination.

Matter of Debate

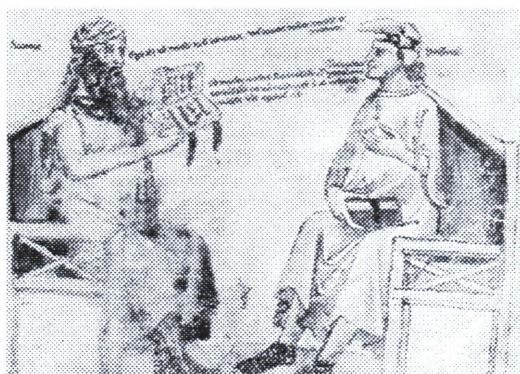
If debating with other ufologists makes you feel like you're banging your head against a brick wall, Gareth Medway explains why

IN THE MIDDLE Ages it was fairly easy to hold a reasoned debate, because there were basic authorities and assumptions that no-one challenged.

The Bible, the decisions of the Church councils, and the writings of the Fathers provided the fundamental guides, and from them one could logically derive an answer to most if not all questions.

Suppose that the topic of debate was: Can a demon lover make a woman pregnant? Genesis 6:4 says that "the sons of God came unto the daughters of men, and they bare children unto them"; while St Augustine in *The City of God*, Book 15, Chapter 23, explained that "the sons of God" in this passage meant angels who rebelled, were cast out of heaven and became demons. So it was easy to reach the common consensus that demons can make women pregnant, though there remained the vexed question of whether they use their own semen or not.

Of course, there were a few problems. St Augustine believed in the pre-existence of souls, which was later ruled to be heretical. Classical authors were a doubtful point: the protagonists in



a dialogue on witchcraft, published in 1489, debated among other things whether witches could turn humans into animals. In favour of the proposition, one cited Apuleius's *The Golden Ass*, in which a man is changed into a donkey by a witch's potion, but this was held to be invalid as evidence because Apuleius was a pagan (rather than the more obvious objection that *The Golden Ass* is a work of fiction.) But these were minor issues.

Nowadays there is practically nothing that the majority of people will assent to. In the UFO field one might agree that at least everyone will agree that it is possible that there could be life on other planets. Yet this is often denied on the grounds that either:

- Extraterrestrial life cannot exist because it is not mentioned in the Bible; or
- That the chances of life arising anywhere are so infinitesimally small that we can be sure it has only happened once in the lifetime of the universe.

Obviously, if two people's initial axioms and postulates are different, then they will reach different conclusions even if their

reasoning processes are wholly logical. For example, a ufologist who begins from the premise that there is no other life in the universe will not arrive at the ETH.

Whilst half a century of ufology has not produced evidence that would convince a sceptic, from as early as the 1940s there has been enough to persuade believers, usually beyond all doubt, that we are being visited by beings from outer space. The question thus reduces to one of personal opinion. Your opinion is far more sophisticated and well-informed than that of your opponents, of course: but what is the use of knowing that, when they erroneously think the same of themselves?

The rationalist, scientific view of the universe rests in part upon a series of negative propositions: that there is no God, or at least no perceptible divine influence upon the world; that there are no undiscovered forces; and so on. But it is impossible to prove negative propositions, which tends to place the sceptic in a weak position. In response to this fact, Kendrick Frasier of CSICOP pro-

posed that extraordinary claims require extraordinary proof, and that the burden of proof is upon the claimant. For instance, the atheist cannot prove that there is no afterlife; but if it is said that it is extraordinary to believe in life after death, then the onus passes to the religious believer.

But what is 'extraordinary'? To take an extreme example, in parts of the East it is not regarded as in any way extraordinary for a man to rise from the dead. Gita Mehta's *Karma Cola* describes how a guru was said to have brought back to life a man who had been dead for three days. What most impressed the guru's disciple, apparently, was not the resurrection itself, but that the guru had been able to find the body, which had been lost by the staff of the chaotically run morgue.

Now, ufologists do not of course study UFOs but UFO reports. Here, the question of plausibility become crucial. Much sceptical writing on ufology boils down to something like: "It's *more likely* they were seeing Venus than an extraterrestrial spacecraft", simply because ETs are regarded as inherently implausible. By contrast the ETHers' basic assumption is that not only is it possible, but probable, that alien spacecraft will be monitoring the Earth. Since a plausible claim does not require extraordinary proof, they are happy with a modicum of evidence. They may also say that *is* implausible is that the witnesses should have mistaken Venus for a spacecraft, so the sighting must

have been of the latter.

Notice that neither point of view is testable; hence, despite claims to the contrary, neither is actually scientific. One result is that the same facts are taken to support various antipathetic conclusions. To return to the old demonic issue, consider this passage from the 13th century Jewish mystical book *The Zohar*: "... when a man dreams in his sleep, female spirits often come and disport with him, and so conceive from him and subsequently give birth. The creatures thus produced ... appear always under the form of human beings, but they have no hair on their heads ... In the same way male spirits visit women-folk and make them pregnant ..." It is easy to predict what the comments of the various ufological factions would be on this: ETHers would seize on it as proof that aliens have been cross-breeding with us for centuries; PSHERs would think it shows that the abduction scenario is just a continuation of mediaeval demonology; and Christian fundamentalists would say therefore the 'aliens' are demons in disguise. No amount of argument for any of these viewpoints will convince a believer in a contrary viewpoint.

(I have wondered for some time what the Muslim view of UFOs might be; recently I found a brief exposition in Ahmed Hulusi's *Allah*, translated by Ahmed Baki, Kitsan Publishing, Istanbul, 1994, pp.23-5, who, predictably, states that they are nothing other than jinns, who also pretend to be elves, demons and saints, and whose intention is to deceive humans and lead them away from Allah. His reason for thinking this is, no doubt, that jinns are mentioned in the Koran but aliens are not. Apparently Hulusi wrote a book on this theme, still available in Turkish, as long ago as 1972.)

The split is not just between believers and sceptics. Believers suppose that advanced ETs will agree with their views on important subjects. the Revolutionary Workers Party (not to be confused with the Workers' Revolutionary Party or the Party of Revolutionary Workers) used to believe, and no doubt still do if they still exist, that UFOs are emissaries from another, socialist, galaxy. They would certainly reject as spurious any stories about

blue-eyed, blonde-haired Venusians with racist views, though some have been reported: "Some contactees who claimed to have visited Mars blandly point out that the planet is divided into zones with the negro and Jewish Martians carefully segregated from the others" (John Keel, *Our Haunted Planet*, p.85.) These are extreme cases, but there has always been enmity between New Agers whose friendly spacemen preach New Age philosophy, and the scientific ufologists who picture aliens as super-technologists, not necessarily friendly. There is not exactly perfect harmony amongst non-ETH ufologists, as can be judged by the letters page of *Magonia*. To a great extent these arguments arise, not from anyone's findings, but from their differing initial assumptions.

As far as our present knowledge goes, interstellar travel is effectively impossible. Yet it is at least conceivable that things like anti-gravity drives and faster than light travel might be realised one day, since technology has achieved things which experts had said could not be done, such as moon rockets. So whether aliens could travel here from other star systems is not so much a scientific question as a question of how much faith we have in our present state of scientific knowledge.

How useful is expert opinion? The public are often suspicious of experts, sometimes on the reasonable grounds that it is hard to know when an expert is really speaking from expert knowledge, and when merely expressing an opinion. Conversely, people may readily trust an apparent expert who says what they want to hear. In any case it is doubtful if anyone can be called an expert in fields that are mere guesswork, such as exo-biology or flying saucer propulsion systems, central topics in the UFO debate.

Does it matter? If aliens are visiting the Earth, then this fact will not be altered whether we believe in them or not. On the other hand, if it is true that UFOs are really demons or jinns bent on deceiving us, then people ought to be warned against them. If they are merely products of human imagination, then no doubt in time people will go on to imagining other things. But reason leads only to the conclusion that in this field reason leads nowhere.

Back Issues

A range of *Magonia* back issues are available for sale. The issues listed below are immediately available, at a cost of £2.00 (\$4.); FF20.00) each, post paid. For availability of earlier issues see *Magonias* 69 and 70

Number 45. Manhattan transfer: critique of the Linda Napolitano case. Crashed Saucers or Grounded Research: reviewing Roswell. Martin Kottmeyer on 60's UFO Paranoia. David Jacob's *Secret Life*.

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A Sceptical View of Dr French

Montague Keene is a long-time member of the Society for Psychical Research. He is a co-author of a report on the 'Scole experiment' which is reviewed in this issue of *Magonia*

As a useful defence mechanism against madness, non-fictional book reviewers employ a few shortcuts before deciding how much of their precious time should be spent slogging through hefty tomes which turn out to be largely worthless. Of say the index of a guide to English Literature turns out to have seven references to Enid Blyton, five to Jeffrey Archer, four to Agatha Christie and one each to Shakespeare, Dickens and Thackeray, they may be forgiven for suspecting that no more than a hour of time and two inches of column type need be dedicated to their task. Or take a study of the conflict between Creationists and Darwinists: if the bibliography mentions only works favouring one side rather than the other, one can safely assume that the book is unlikely to warrant commendation to readers as an example of objectivity, whatever its merits.

I have found this short cut invaluable when reading books (mainly published by Prometheus, the organ of the sceptical movement in the USA) or articles, especially in the *Skeptical Enquirer* or the *Skeptic*, dealing with the paranormal in general, and psychical research in particular. Just as they tend to avoid citing those works which present evidence unpalatable to the author's prejudices, so the resolute sceptic will vigorously and righteously assail phoney, sloppy or extravagant claims of paranormality but steer clear of a straight confrontation with evidence which is so con-

vincing that they are left with nothing to support their convictions but accusations of mass fraud or deliberate cheating by experimenters.

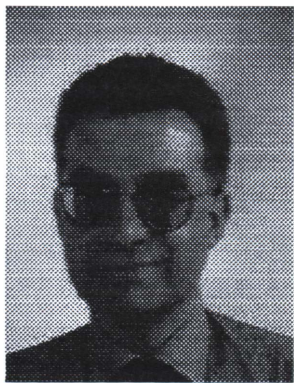
I spoke at the same SPR conference at which Chris gave his paper on the manner in which the media treat the paranormal (on which he based the prize-winning entry published in your last issue), and found myself agreeing with much of what he said. My complaint is against his selectivity: he focussed on *The Paranormal World of Paul McKenna* to support his thesis. It is unfortunate that he should have given so much prominence to a much flaunted experiment by Richard Wiseman *et al* purportedly contesting the claim that a dog called Jaytee had a telephic rapport with its owner, when Chris ought to have been aware of the far more extensive tests undertaken on this dog by Rupert Sheldrake and published most recently in his book *Dogs that Know when their Owners are Coming Home*, showing overwhelming evidence that Jaytee did in fact possess such powers. Still, Chris could hardly have realised, when citing the Wiseman paper published in the *British Journal of Psychology*, that this august journal doesn't believe in the paranormal, or in publishing Sheldrake's refutations of misstatements.

Having sat through two of McKenna's programmes and participated in one, I am surprised (well, not really) that to maintain the posture of objectivity, Chris

couldn't have mentioned a few of the rather more objective episodes, or even their decision to show their objectivity by screening the unmasking of the cheating psychokinetic claimant, Jean-Pierre Girard. What about Valery Lavrinenko's bio-PK demonstration in raising and lowering from normal to 140 and back down to a perilous 35 the blood pressure of a monitored patient in a distant room; or the video clip of Rene Pe'och's celebrated experiments with day-old chicks, fixated on a robot whose random movements the chicks were clearly able to influence; or the demonstration of the famous distance viewer (i.e. clairvoyant), Joe McMonagle or his capacity to describe with reasonable accuracy the scene being viewed by a third party; or Dean Radin's pretty decisive PK demonstration showing how a random number generator was significantly affected by the vibes, or whatever, generated by heaven knows how many million eager viewers as the listened to the outcome of the O. J. Simpson trial.

then there was the twin experiment, showing the physiologically measured changes in one remotely separated twin when a disguised powder keg blew up in front of her sibling during the show. How come no reference to these? On the basis of what evidence ought we conclude that all these were either fraudulent or seriously defective in the rigour of their experimental procedure? Is entertainment inherently and inevitably incompatible occasional honesty?

But beyond the McKenna programmes, there have been a spate of others which occasionally confront the statutory sceptic (TV producers consider themselves under a duty, in the interests of the God Balance, to find a sceptic who can explain away some apparently remarkable phenomenon). I recall one devoted entirely to one of the most famous physical mediums of the twentieth century, Helen Duncan, jailed in 1944 for 18 months under the Witchcraft Act. Duncan was stripped, examined *in vaginum et rectum*, which modesty prevents me from translating, garbed into some form of ladies' straight-jacket, and on occasions orally administered a dye to see whether her ectoplasmic discharges were no more than regurgitated



"One must in fairness acknowledge Chris [above] to be among the less dogmatic sceptics"

butter-muslin - the theory of the surplus stomach having been decisively disproved - and was none the less able when in a trance to have ectoplasm issuing from various orifices to assume the forms and develop the features of dear departed. When the sceptical expert, who had actually been present at her trial, was invited to explain where the ectoplasm had come from, he confidently asserted that it must have all been concealed in her rectum.

This is a case where the sceptical explanation is seen by the viewer to be even more improbable than the miracle it purports to account for in non-paranormal terms. It therefore satisfies the criterion in David Hume's theory of miracles. However, one must in fairness acknowledge Chris to be among the less dogmatic sceptics, and liable with the rest of us to squirm when confronted by sheer bigotry; and at least he doesn't serve as an editorial adviser to that institution of devout disbelief, the so-called CSICOP., as do three of his sceptical colleagues. My complaint is that he follows their practice of either ignoring persuasive but discomforting evidence of the paranormal or, if pinned against a wall, resorting to the excuse that while the results of the phenomenon might not be readily explicable in accord with current scientific beliefs, it's pretty certain that sooner or later someone will come up with an answer. On that basis nothing novel can ever be satisfactorily demonstrated.

Take precognitive messages. Chris has trotted out the usual pseudo-mathematical explanation, that if you multiply all the dreams by the number of nights people have in which to dream them, the chances are that one or other of them will sooner or later bear some resemblance to some corresponding later event in their lives. I've challenged Chris on this spurious get-out in the past, but I'll give him due notice of an event which will form part of a peer-reviewed paper to be published later this year, and ask whether his probability theory is still adequate.

A professional medium received a message from a deceased mother to the effect that he will be seeing her daughter shortly and wishes to convey to her a favourite prayer. Impressed, the me-

dium searches out the prayer and has it laminated and gift wrapped. He takes it to a sitting held in laboratory-controlled conditions three days later in a distant university to give a blind reading to an unknown sitter. At the conclusion of the sitting the experimenter passes the gift to the sitter, who promptly bursts into tears on reading her mother's favourite prayer.

Now what has this got to do with Chris French? Quite a lot really, despite the fact that this message did not arrive in a dream. It raises the same question, however: could this all have happened by chance? It's an unusual but not an exceptional example of where very memorable traumatic dreams are shortly followed by incidents so precise, specific and unusual that a sceptic confronted with it can only resort to accusations of invention or fraud.

How does Chris treat cases like this? Answer: he follows the orthodox and safe practice of ignoring them. How many of his students, for whom, God help us, he provides courses in parapsychology at Goldsmith's College, know of the scores of such cases recorded in the *Census of Hallucinations* more than a century ago? How many have even heard of the outcome of the twenty years long investigation into the mediumship of Mrs Leonore Piper, as a result of which some of the most resolute sceptics were painfully converted to the conviction that she was either channelling messages from the dead or, at the very least, was capable of drawing information from the minds of unknown sitters and unknown third parties?

No less spectacular were the results of the proxy (i.e. blind) sittings which experts like Oliver Lodge and Drayton Thomas conducted with Mrs Osborne Leonard. Has he ever devoted a single lecture to these giants of the séance room? Is he not aware that my distinguished colleague Professor Archie Roy four or five years ago publicly threw down the gauntlet to sceptics everywhere by drawing attention to some of the best known and most impressively evidential cases on record, beseeching the critics to offer explanations, and receiving not a whisper in response?

On the questionable basis that truth decays as iron rusts,

people like Chris can argue that many of these cases took place long ago. Or they may simply seek safety in silence. But it is becoming that this can't last much longer. The overwhelming evidence from laboratory based research into psychokinesis, telepathy and clairvoyance can't be ignored or derided indefinitely: their results can be attributed to chance only one in several million, occasionally billion, times. The intensity of criticism that such experiments attracted in the past has resulted in protocols so loophole free that even the most formidable of critics, the champion put forward by the notorious CSICOP organisation, Professor Ray Hyman, has been forced to acknowledge that the odds against a chance explanation of some of the results are astronomical.

Psychology lecturers who wish to give their students a smattering of knowledge about parapsychology rely on standard textbooks. Almost always they present "nearly incredible falsification of the facts about experiments." That was what Irwin Child, the chairman of Yale University's department of psychology, concluded after examining most of the then (1985) current textbooks. A more recent (1991) study by psychologist Miguel Roig and colleagues of 64 introductory psychology textbooks found that one third of them made no mention of parapsychology, several of those which did presented the zener card calling tests as still typical of current experimental work, and all of those which did mention spontaneous cases explained them away in terms of misunderstood sensory processes, coincidence and self-deception. They thereby ignored the fact that methods have long since been employed by every self-respecting researcher in this field to eliminate all of these obvious weaknesses even when dealing with evidential mediumship or independently validated precognitive dreams, or multiple witnesses of poltergeist activity and the like. Of those textbooks which did refer to experimental work, nearly all criticised the lack of replication, poor experimental design and fraud.

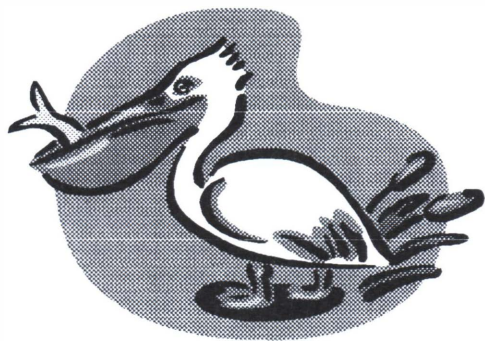
Now the average run-of-the-mill psychology lecturer can be forgiven if he relies upon the accuracy and fairness of textbooks to guide his students. But

for the few who have first-hand knowledge of the subject, and who know, or certainly ought to know, that all the last three criticisms are simply untrue, it is difficult to grope around for excuses. Either they know that their students are being indoctrinated by information on the subject which is not just misleading or inadequate but simply false, as Dean Radkin's book *The Conscious Universe* makes strikingly clear; or they don't. In the former case they invite the charge of hypocrisy. In the latter case they face the accusation of incompetence.

It is all very well to proclaim, as Chris does, that he is "generally unconvinced" by the evidence. It is quite another to engage in a frank examination of that evidence to show where it is faulty; and as far as I am aware this is what Chris doesn't. Nor, one has to say, do most of his equally prominent colleagues, although from time to time one or other (mainly one) of them will seize upon a famous historic case and seek to show, by piling one improbable and unproven assumption on another, how it might all be explained by fraud.

It is healthy and desirable to emphasise the need for the utmost caution in evaluating the evidence. Let alone setting up experiments, in parapsychology. It is important to understand the history and psychology of deception in this murky field. It is vital to appreciate the unreliability of human witness, memory and testimony, even those of multiple witnesses. But where, over the years, experiments in the ganzfeld or in random number generated psychokinesis tests, have eliminated all of these dangers, and done so to the satisfaction of resolute critics, and the results have nevertheless been highly significant and frequently replicated, it is verging on the dishonourable to suppress this information and churn out students with the now traditional prejudices which have so seriously impeded research.

Of course, people like Chris - and there are only a handful of them in these teaching roles - may yet undergo conversion. But then bang goes that prospective professorship, and in come the taunts and jibes of ones peers. Not an easy option.



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The Pelican writes...

In the previous issue the Pelican discussed the famous incident of 17 April 1966 in which Dale Spaur and Barney Neff chased a UFO, or Venus, depending on your prejudices and presuppositions on such matters. The Pelican's main concern about this case was the fact that two police officers attempted to chase something in the sky. Sceptics have suggested that the reason they chased after the mysterious - or allegedly mysterious - object was that they enjoyed fast driving, and that this incident provided a suitable excuse. Now if this is so, then they were irresponsible; if this is not so, then they were just plain stupid.

Of course, Spaur and Neff were not the only police officers to indulge in such behaviour. There was a very similar case in England which occurred early one morning in October 1967. According to Robert Chapman:

"The policemen radioed their headquarters that they had spotted some kind of unidentified flying object and were going to investigate. As they moved forward the 'Thing' also seemed to move as though deliberately keeping its distance; the faster they travelled the faster it sped ahead until at times they found themselves doing nearly ninety miles an hour. The squad car flashed round corners, streaked up hills and swooped down valleys trying to keep up but the nearest Waycott and Willey got to it was four hundred yards." (1)

This incident got a lot of publicity at the time, but apparently no one questioned the wisdom of attempting to chase an airborne object in a car. As in the American case, Venus was suggested as an explanation. And if it wasn't Venus, then perhaps it was a formation of aircraft engaged on refuelling exercises. Astronomers pointed out that Venus was very bright in the eastern sky in the early morning at that time. How-

ever, in the account given by Chapman it is not clear in what direction the police car was travelling. The police officers were said to have been driving "along the A3072 between Okchampton and Holsworthy" when they saw the object ahead of them. This seems to imply that they were driving towards Holsworthy, in which case the object could not have been Venus, as they would have been going in a westerly direction. If they were travelling in the opposite direction then it possibly could have been Venus, though not if the descriptions of the object and its behaviour are reasonably accurate. Apparently, when the policemen first spotted the object, they woke a man who was sleeping in his car at the roadside to ask him to confirm that they were not "seeing things". The man saw "what appeared to be a collection of pulsating lights in the sky and, as he looked, the lights formed into a cross and began to move off into the distance". Of course, if we want to make sense of something odd seen in the sky then we need information about the visibility and the clouds at the time of the sighting. As with the American case, this vital information is not provided.

There were other UFO reports on the nights of 25, 26 and 27 October, including some by police officers, and, like most other descriptions of UFO flaps, Chapman's account is very confusing to the poor old Pelican. Although astronomers at the Royal Observatory, Herstmonceux, Sussex, had attributed the sightings to Venus, they apparently changed their minds after receiving a report from an amateur astronomer whom they had asked to look into the matter. This astronomer said that he had seen a UFO below cloud level. Then someone else reported seeing a formation of lights which was obviously a group of aircraft engaged on a refuelling exercise. The Ministry of Defence endorsed this explanation and said that there had been mid-air refuelling exercises by the US Air Force over the West Country. However, the Ministry later withdrew this explanation, saying that there had been no exercises at the times of the sightings. The exercises took place between 5 p.m. and 9 p.m., whereas the UFO sightings took place between midnight and dawn.

One source of confusion in the sightings of October 1967 is that they obviously do not all refer to the same objects or phenomena, and the reports tend to be so vague that it is impossible to make much sense of them. Reports involving independent witnesses seeing something strange at about the same time and in the same area are rare, so a recently investigated incident in Canada should be of interest to serious ufologists.

This UFO event occurred on the evening of 11 December 1996 along a 134-mile stretch of the Klondike Highway in the Yukon Territory. Investigator Martin Jasek managed to trace 22 witnesses, who were in three separate groups. (2) The UFO was described as consisting of a huge row, or rows, of lights, and some witnesses said that they were attached to a solid object. No sounds were heard, but all estimates agreed that the UFO was of enormous size. Witnesses' estimates gave a size of about 0.5 km, but Jasek's estimates, based on rough triangulation, gave sizes of between 0.88 and 2.0 km.

On the face of it, this is a good multi-witness report for which the true explanation is not obvious, and, as such, one would expect that it would by now have generated considerable controversy, including the usual pick-and-mix selection of explanations from the sceptics. But, no, the Pelican has seen nothing about it so far on the UFO Updates web site, just reports of loony UFO conferences, Roswell, Cydonia, Roswell, the McMinnville photos, Roswell, evidence of alien abduction from fluff under the bed, Roswell, and Roswell. At the beginning of April, Jasek posted details on Updates of a further sighting on the Klondike Highway, on 30 March 2000. This was a classic domed-disc UFO. Still no comments (at the time of writing this), though. Perhaps the American ufologists can't think of anything daft enough to say about it. But maybe they'll get around to it eventually. Meanwhile, the Pelican is desperately trying to think of a pelicanist explanation.

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2. Jasek, Martin. "22 witnesses report giant UFO in Yukon", *MUFON UFO Journal*, 382, February 2000



Readers' Letters

Dear Magonia,
I read your ill-informed review of Larry O'Hara's *At War With the Universe* (AWWU) with some interest. I'd have been more impressed if the reviewer, Peter Rogerson, had taken his own advice and asked me some searching questions about my supposedly colourful past - but he hasn't and so I can only conclude that his overly pompous and patronising words are based upon prejudice and second-hand data.

Rogerson appears to have fallen into the trap of believing elements of O'Hara's repetitious, wholly unimpressive and turgid script in relation, for instance, to mistaken claims that I wrote, edited and published the Church of the Creator newsletter, attacked a policeman in 1988 and so on. (In terms of the allegation, soon thrown out in the lower courts, that I 'assaulted' a PC Rowlands, I should point out that independent testimony indicated that I was some 100 yards away from the scene of this 12 year old crime. Given O'Hara's support for what he calls the "old left" - by which I assume he means the clapped out and ideologically bankrupt gang of former 'comrades' who now inhabit the town halls and classrooms and who launched attack upon attack on the Police during the 1970s and 1980s - his remarks about the Police are, at best, hypocritical.) I did neither of these but in any case, and given the obvious dangers posed by groups like the COTC and its UK adherents, I make no apologies for having exposed Alan Milnes, John Hill and Walter Carr (currently a BNP organiser for Worcestershire) and their links with well-armed extremists in the USA.

For the record, and in case any of your readers are interested, I can tell you that at no time have I "encouraged" violence as the many hundreds of witnesses to my lectures at meetings and conferences can attest. I have always sought to discourage violence and have supported the development

and use of a strict Code of Conduct for UFO investigators which covers things like breaking into bases and, more generally, the law.

I have never worked for or been paid by the intelligence services and at no time have I found evidence to suggest that *Searchlight* magazine has active, current or long-standing links with elements of Special Branch, MI5 or Army Intelligence. Even if Gerry Gable had made such arrangements, I would be in full support of these because stopping terrorism and racial attacks are more important than any of Larry O'Hara's politically correct, conspiracy-minded posturing.

My supposed involvement with the ridiculous *Green Anarchist* magazine and its few active supporters has been deliberately exaggerated by Steve Booth and Paul Rogers for their own limited ends. At no time did I encourage them or their supporters to move in a violent direction and only came to know the unfortunate Booth through anti-Poll Tax campaigning. Booth, Rogers and, by default, O'Hara's support for animal rights terrorism both then and now (Rogers was an active and violent animal liberationist years before he met me) makes a mockery of their claims about my "role as a provocateur". They are basically seeking to blame their bad judgement, extreme beliefs, activity and its expected results - prosecution - on somebody other than themselves. Theirs is the familiar extremist mantra; "if you're not for us you're against us". This kind of thinking is echoed in O'Hara's many unproven claims and theories about 'MI5 agents' and 'state assets' controlling everything from Lancashire UFO Society to the National Front. As Stewart Home, other anarchists and extreme leftists have noted, Rogers and Booth's well-documented support for the Aum "Supreme Truth" cult, the Unabomber, the ALF, massive depopulation and the Oklahoma bombers shows us exactly where

the violence is coming from.

Just what any of this has to do with Ufology is anyone's guess but by taking a leaf out of the darksiders book O'Hara and Booth have sought to suggest my acting as a government asset "probably since 1987". Like the bulk of their writing, this conclusion is based upon no factual information whatsoever but, instead, supposition, speculation and idle gossip.

Peter Rogerson should have taken his own advice before penning a response to O'Hara's ranting and asked me about any of the incidents or groups that I have allegedly been involved in - and which he is so bothered about. At least he is right about one thing: the non-event at the January 1998 Southport Conference where O'Hara and Rogers forced their way into the hall before being ejected. The vast majority of attendees were disgusted at O'Hara's antics and have since become staunch supporters not only of my right to speak but of my considered and factual research into classified aircraft projects.

I can't help thinking that *Magonia* would be better served concentrating upon the facts relating to man-made UFOs and the hundreds of pages of new FOIA material I have spent the last 18 months requesting and collating. Although my research doesn't support your favoured editorial opinions about the nature of the UFO experience, hundreds of aviation enthusiasts and UFO researchers certainly do and are not at all interested in Mr. Rogerson's armchair Ufology.

Any suggestion of a "nazi" agenda with regard to UFOs is mistaken as I make very clear in my book *UFO Revelation* (Blandford 1999). The suggestion that Cassell publishers were involved in a conspiracy to promote nazi ideology is all the evidence we need to write off anything written by O'Hara and Booth. Less than 5% of my book deals with the questionable "Nazi UFO" ma-



terial from the 1950s. It is neither integral nor political. Of course, Bill Sweetman has said (see his book *Stealth Bomber*, Motorbooks 1989, page 41) that: "The prototype had solid plywood wing skins, but the production version was to have been skinned with a sandwich material comprising two thin plywood sheets and a core made of sawdust, charcoal and glue. The material was expressly intended to absorb radar waves and the Hortens realised that the reflective steel engines and steel-tube substructure of the aircraft would be concealed under the absorbent skins. It is questionable whether the material would have been effective... but such question paled besides what the Horten brothers had accomplished. Their design was to achieve lower detectability by a combination of suitable external shape and integral RAM, built into the load-bearing structure." He therefore supports my conclusions as does Nick Cook of Jane's.

I should also add here that *At War With Society* was a *Searchlight* magazine effort based upon a few short explanatory notes I sent to Gerry Gable in early 1993 and which, I made clear to him on several occasions, were not to be published. O'Hara neglects to mention that I engaged the services of Rex Makin, a well-known firm of Liverpool solicitors, to sue Gable for the later publication of *AWWS*. Since 1993 I have spoken to Gable twice and although I remain on reasonable terms with both him and his investigations staff, I have had no involvement with them since that time. I did offer my services to the Anti-Terrorist Branch after the Brixton and Soho bombings and was interviewed in relation to my limited knowledge of Combat 18. I never heard from the ATB again.

I am disgusted by Rogerson's "suspicion that he may be a fantasist with a penchant for violence." This is utter nonsense and there is no evidence to support his "suspicion." Here, as elsewhere,

Rogerson simply accepts O'Hara's allegations and, as a result, I am currently working on my own report, *At War With Reality* (published by Extremely Paranoid Productions) which will set the record straight and provide readers with remarkable new facts about man-made UFOs. This will be free upon request by e-mail or in printed booklet form (send £1 in stamps for postage) via: Tim Matthews, BCM 4067, London WC1N 3XX. Unlike O'Hara I'm not charging £6 and I'm not going to include one scene from the Nuremberg rallies on the front cover. As usual, I am happy to answer any serious questions relating to my former activities and/or current research effort. Best wishes, Tim Matthews, Southport, Merseyside

Dear John Rimmer
There are many points where we would disagree with Peter Rogerson's review of *At War with the Universe (AWWU)*. To raise just two of them:

Rogerson is quite wrong to assert that O'Hara gave Hepple advanced warning that he would attend the Hepple-organised Southport UFO conference (January 1998). Hepple would have been made aware of the strong possibility of exposure by the display of posters of himself outside the opening day of the Portsmouth 'Gandalf' Trial, in late August 1997, and in the publication of the fact of his new identity in *Lobster* magazine, December 1997. Larry O'Hara was responsible for either of these events.

Secondly, in response to Rogerson's carping about *AWWU* not mentioning people like Patrick Wall and Gordon Creighton. I would like to draw Rogerson's attention to the distinction between 'Far Right' and 'Fascist'. Some (political) critics of *AWWU* claim that *all* ufologists are fundamentally fascist, because the extraterrestrial hypothesis is an allegorical form of anti-Semitism. We dis-

agree with this, and call on people interested in this area to (1) Think hard and long about the definition of 'Fascist' (2) Only apply the 'F'-word where it is appropriate, as indiscriminate use of that term confuses the issues.

I would also like to point out the fact that my name is Stephen, not Robert
With best wishes
Stephen Booth, London WC1

Dear Mr Rimmer
I shall not be renewing my subscription to *Magonia*. The reason? Because I can't stand it any longer! When I first received your magazine I found it rather amusing to read your PC views but several editions later, I find it tedious and wearing and oh so boring, as there are never any surprises. Even believers occasionally find a case to be untenable and are forever questioning and probing: bit you, change your policy? Never!

You think of yourselves as sceptics, but they are purring pussycats compared with your inflexible attitude. I can't stand *Magonia*'s predetermined disbelief. I can't stand its relentless denials and its grim, resolute face set against all things unusual and paranormal. A bona-fide investigation is approached with an open mind and a desire to discover the truth whatever its implications, whereas the *Magonia* team don't even bother to approach, they jump straight in with mundane explanations because they are not interested in the truth, only with debunking and disproving.

Before I go, I should like to repeat my challenge I set several months ago for Magonians to answer my two sticking points.

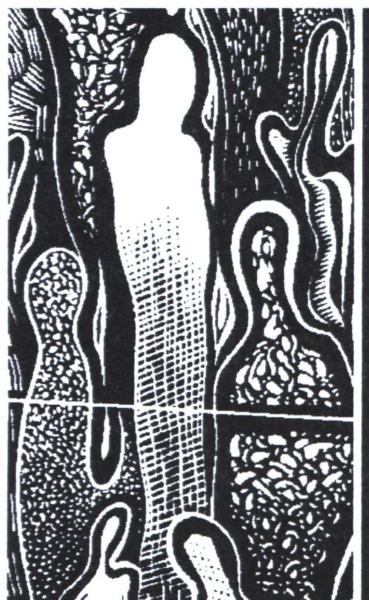
Firstly, why do normal folk experience missing time whilst taking normal journeys, time that is verified by friends and relatives waiting to greet the travellers? Secondly, why do normal folk wake up to find themselves in the wrong bed or in the wrong room or even the wrong house wearing back-to-front or inside-out

or strange night-clothes?

I have not heard a peep out of any of the team in answer to these two questions because they cannot possibly be explained away. You cannot ignore my challenge any longer. Please face up to it and give me an answer. I shall especially be eager to hear how you account for a stranger's night attire in the wash several months after it was acquired so bizarrely. If you cannot put forward an acceptable resolution to these enigmas, then it pours serious doubt on the rest of your interpretations of 'contemporary vision and belief' which cannot stand if two parts are out of step with the whole. As decent people your only course is to take the honourable way out and pack up *Magonia* and go home, but of course with me out of the way, you will all be free to practice your deriding and debunking professions with nary a soul to protest.
Yours sincerely
Margaret Buckingham,
Bournemouth

Dear Magonia,
I was disturbed by your Editorial (*Magonia* 70) about suppressing UFO abduction material. It may be way-out, sick, or whatever, but I thought ufologists were supposed to *investigate* UFO cases and abduction claims. The natural response to cult writing is simply to ignore the material and concentrate on the percipients claim - the percipient is not *forced* to undergo investigation - they can take it or leave it. Much of what is happening in the UFO world these days reminds one of the wilder excesses of Freudism - wild claims, bizarre beliefs and cult mentality; and that's just the investigators / commentators!

Are you seeking a form of censorship, I wonder? Criticise their methodology by all means, but do try to ignore the rubbish and concentrate on the UFO/abduction.
Anthony R. Brown,
Invernesshire.



Scole for Scandal?

Searching through two recent reports of the same physical mediumship case **Peter Rogerson** finds plenty of convincing evidence, but not what the authors had in mind.

The basic background of these books is simple: four people (out of an original group of seven) with a background in mediumship and related topics, met in a room in a farmhouse in Scole near Diss, Norfolk, and amazing things were said to happen. These included direct voice mediumship, apports, images on still photographs and video recordings, voices on audio tapes, materialised spirit forms, odd lights and in fact the whole shebang of physical mediumship. After a while others are invited to join in the fun, and the group go on tour.

Normally this sort of thing would be barely noticed outside the pages of *Psychic News* but on this occasion, three members of the Society for Psychical Research, Arthur Ellison, David Fontana and Montague Keen have investigated and appear to endorse the claims. So, is there any evidence in these books which would challenge sceptics like me?

I will take the books in the order I read them, firstly, my response to *The Scole Experiment*. At first it doesn't seem very hopeful that much evidence of any kind could be obtained from this book, as its scientific value is negligible. The Solomons only met the group in May 1998, while most of the events recorded in their book took place in 1993-6; so it would seem that much of the material presented is hearsay, told by members of the group and their friends. Some direct testimony is given, some of it by 'scientists', but the majority of these turn to be obscure and credulous spiritualists.

Despite this unimpressive background, I found that very convincing evidence does emerge - that nothing paranormal actually happened - but the authors themselves seem quite unconscious of just how this evidence mounts up as we go along.

Right at the beginning, in Arthur Ellison's introduction, the clues begins to mount. Now, you know that all these seances have to be held in the dark because bright lights do nasty things to the psychic vibrations; well Ellison suggests, why not use infra red photography, with the illumination provided by the participants own body heat, which would allow investigators to keep track of them. Eh, well, er, no actually, because you see its not actually the light as such, but the electric circuits in lights which disturb the vibes. This changing of the goal posts sets the tone throughout. Later the investigators suggest placing objects in sealed plastic containers for the spirits to read and influence. Eh, em, well no actually, because the psychic vibes can't get through plastic you see. Then there are the spirits - you know the sort: Manu the Inca, Patrick the 'spoiled priest' from Ireland, with a touch of blarney, Ranji the Indian prince, Mrs Bradshaw with her 'clipped Oxford accent'. Did someone mention 'music-hall stereotypes? Well these jolly spirits like jolly rousing (i.e. loud and distracting) music. Raji the Indian prince in particular likes good jolly martial tunes (wouldn't an Indian Prince prefer, well, Indian music? Be quiet you awful sceptic).

Then there are the conditions attached: don't think sceptical thoughts that will inhibit the phenomena, sit still, don't move unless you are told, don't grab at lights or levitated objects. In other words a mixture of excuses and conditions which individually and collectively tend towards making fraud easier rather than more difficult. A happy coincidence?

Well let us explore further. Several of the phenomena, in order to fake, would have needed access to good quality copies of ancient newspapers, printed sale catalogues and such like. The sort of thing you might come across if you were in the paper trade, perhaps buying up the discarded contents of newspaper libraries, solicitors and estate agents offices, for repulping. By another of those happy coincidences one of the principals in the affair just happens to work in the paper trade.

Then we are told that the phenomena are being organised by a collective of great scientists on 'the other side'. Ah, perhaps we will at least get some real science then. Of course not, just the same old parade of spiritualist/theosophist/occultist cliches from a past age, helped out with the excuse 'you wouldn't understand' when the going gets tough. This was a wise move, because on one occasion there is a major slip up. Dr Ellison, an electrical engineer, uses the word 'rectify' in a precise technical sense related to radio waves, but the 'spirit scientists' make the mistake of assuming it was used in the everyday sense. An odd mistake for a collective of

Grant and Jane Solomon. *The Scole experiment: scientific evidence for life after death.* Piatkus, 1999. £16.99

Montague Keen, Arthur Ellison and David Fontana. *The Scole Report.* Society for Psychical Research, 1999. £9.00 (Proceedings of the SPR 58 (220), November 1999)

Either the mediums are fooling the investigators, or everyone is being fooled by mischievous boggarts. I leave the boggarts to Peter Hough.

great minds to make, but not for a non-technically trained medium to make, you might think.

Then add in all the stuff like the trumpet mediumship, so redolent of generations of sleazy back-room mediumship, and the evidence for fraud becomes pretty overwhelming. What was surprising was not that this was fraud, but that it was so obvious.

This leaves two mysteries. What possible motives could people have for performing such a charade, and how can intelligent cultivated people fall for such ardent nonsense? The first may always be a mystery, it could range from pious fraud, providing 'evidence' for what you know to be true, something the religious have done time and again. It could be the sense of power of controlling other people, and getting one over on people who make it clear that they regard themselves as your superiors.

And that is a part of what undermined these particular SPR investigators (it should be pointed out in fairness that other SPR investigators are rumoured to be mightily unimpressed). What did for them was a fatal brew of credulity, wishful thinking, and the kind of intellectual and social snobbery which leads to remarks like these, concerning a rather obscure edition of a poem by Wordsworth "it (was) highly unlikely that the members (of the circle) would have knowledge of these matters". Obscure poems by Wordsworth are clearly not for the likes of paper makers, carpenters and such like oiks, who haven't been to Cambridge.

Pretty damning, so when a couple of months later I got a copy of the SPR's own *Scole Report*, I looked to see if there was anything which would make that verdict too harsh. No, for what I read in the *Scole Report* was, if anything even more damning, in the evidence for fraud. For example, before the report was to be published by the SPR the group were asked to produce phenomena

in more controlled circumstances, in a room specially prepared by the SPR. Guess what, the spirit guides told them that the experiment was over, giving some wild-eyed pseudoscientific explanation about influences from the future.

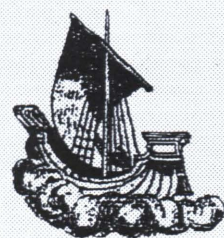
A large chunk of the report is taken up with messages supposed to giving recondite information about early members of the SPR. It then turns out (and it was critics who found this out) that the bulk of this information was in a popular survivalist book *The Survival of Man* by Oliver Lodge, the sort of book that was the mainstay of spiritualist libraries. Is it a coincidence then that the central character in this saga has an extensive library of paranormal books? For a paragraph or two it looks as though our trio are going to have to concede defeat. Ah, but then Montague Keen inspects Foy's library and can't see *Survival of Man* on the shelves. So it must have been paranormal after all. Sighs of relief all round.

And so it goes: damning bits of evidence piling up, such as the spirit recordings with the sounds of breathing, or the paranormal photographs which have the hallmarks of acetate transfers and came from a single book, and so on. The investigators at time almost concede this, but that would mean "all else was spurious" and that would never do because these investigators, including Fontana, described as "a highly qualified psychologist who has worked for over thirty years in the field of human behaviour and motivation" have decided that the mediums are not the stuff frauds are made from. They have been on holiday with them and found them pleasant company and. All of this would be a good deal more impressive if we did not know that far more people, equally qualified in judging human nature in some cases literally swore their life away asserting the absolute integrity and general good eggness of mass-murderer Dr Harold Shipman!

I think on reading this report that credulity is not an adequate explanation; there is something almost perverse about some of the mental gymnastics the authors get up to produce convoluted paranormal explanations for events instead of perfectly straightforward normal ones. They are anything but 'open minded' for they have set their faces against and closed their minds to the possibility of fraud, come what may. Whether this due to a desperate will to believe on the part of these elderly researchers, or the very obvious egotism which comes through as a constant theme: more or less "I am the great panjan-drum, these peasants couldn't put one over on me".

The result must be one of the most incredible documents to be produced by the SPR for many a year, and one which does little credit to the authors. Of course, not all the members of the SPR were taken in, and the report contains detailed critiques by Donald West, Tony Cornell and Alan Gauld, none of them fully paid up psicopers, which quietly demolish the claims and suggest ways that they could have been faked. Even if these particular ways weren't the correct ones, this, as Gauld points out, doesn't mean that we have proved the paranormal, we just haven't worked out how it was done. The authors complain that this would be an impossible hurdle, as sceptics could always assume more and more complex conspiracies. There is an element of truth in this, only to the point that it is difficult to see how any party tricks, however superficially difficult to explain would be evidence for the paranormal, which is why psychical researchers abandoned physical mediumship a couple of generations ago. A mathematical cross correspondence or a workable theory of quantum gravity or some totally esoteric mathematical or physical theorem totally unknown to the non-specialist coming from an averagely educated medium would be much more interesting.

As for the *Scole* affair, perhaps Gauld sums it up best, by arguing, though not using these exact words, that there are only two possible explanations; either the mediums are fooling the investigators, or everyone is being fooled by mischievous boggarts. I



If you live in London, or are passing through, why not come along to the Magonia monthly Readers' Group meetings. These are held on the first Sunday of each month at the Railway pub, Putney. This is just across the road from Putney Station (about 10 - 15 minutes from Waterloo) on the corner of Upper Richmond Road and Putney High Street.

We meet from around 7.15 p.m. onwards as an informal group chatting about anything to do with the topics covered in Magonia. Look out for the table scattered with copies of Magonia and other weird literature!



Book Reviews

Peter D. Ward and Donald Brownlee. *Rare Earth: why complex life is so uncommon in the universe*. Copernicus, 2000. £25.00.

For anyone who has started to follow Peter Brookesmith's series in *Fortean Times*, on the rarity of aliens, this book deals with many of these arguments in much greater detail. Ward and Brownlee's central argument is that while very simple, single celled organisms may be common, appearing almost anywhere remotely possible, the conditions necessary for the appearance of complex multicellular animals (or animal like organisms) are much more restrictive and onerous. Complex organisms, let alone technological intelligences, may be very scarce indeed.

The authors examine the various preconditions which may be needed to before animals could develop. These include being in the right place at the right time, (avoid: hyper-energetic galactic centres and metal-poor outer edges, or the metal-poor early universe, or the radioactive-element-poor late universe), not being in a double or multiple star system, having the right kind of star, having the right kind of planetary system, (avoid: inner gas giants, and, as new solar systems keep being discovered these look surprisingly common; have: outer gas giants to sweep up much cosmic debris), have the right planet (right tilt, need for moon sized satellite, not too much or too little water, right climatic history, importance of plate tectonics and so on) and the right kind of evolutionary history.

This is a pretty formidable list, and in effect the argument is that any complex life bearing worlds would have to be

pretty close to quasi earths, with more or less the same properties and history. Not surprisingly this book looks set to being controversial, violating some pretty established dogmas. In a real sense it is a truly heretical and thus Fortean book, yet, of course, it will not be acclaimed as such by many Forteans, because its message is not one that is popular. The reaction in *New Scientist* and elsewhere hints at the essentially religious and faith based nature of the CETI argument.

Critics of Ward and Brownlee's have accused them of trying to reverse the moves away from anthropomorphism, and not accepting the 'principle of mediocrity'. Well that principle is a philosophical point or even a fashion statement, and not well established science, and equally one can argue that the 'Rare Earth' hypothesis is just a continuation of the disenchantment processes. Behind the CETI dream is the idea that technological species are somehow the goal of the universe and evolution, everything else is just a step on the ladder. What Ward and Brownlee propose is that animals and people are a happy accident in a universe, which if it is designed for anything, is designed for microbes.

To fully understand the implications for the ETH, remember our previous argument, that even given a galaxy filled with millions of rich and diverse biospheres, the chances of any other producing a creature sufficiently physically, psychologically and culturally similar to us to be engaged on our kind of project was remote, if that base is reduced to a few thousand or just a few hundred rich and diverse biospheres, then the odds against another similar technology must be very vast indeed.

David V. Barrett. *Secret Societies: from the ancient and arcane to the modern and clandestine*. Blandford, 1999. £9.99 pbk.

A wide ranging look at secret societies, perhaps too wide ranging, as much space is taken up with a rather breathless tour of a large part of the intellectual history of the west. This means that there is not really enough space to devote to how the modern idea of the subversive secret society began. There is a long, sensible, piece on the Freemasons, exploding some of the myths put about by fundamentalists. However much of this theological debate tends to miss the point, in that in today's secular world these theological niceties just wash over a large proportion, probably a clear majority of the members, who they join organisations like the Freemason's not for spiritual insight or mystical endeavour, but for business networking, in the same way they join the local golf club (This, of course, tends not to apply to those who reach the top leadership, most of whom come from the minority who *do* see it as something more than a social club and perhaps don't always appreciate that some are less other worldly).

Barrett aims most of his fire at fundamentalists who regard any beliefs other than their own as being of the devil. At times his own sympathy for the esoteric means that he fails to appreciate the main criticism of these esoteric groups from humanists and mainstream Christians, Muslims and Jews alike, which is that they are elitist and often dangerously so; or are so concerned with individual personal revelation and spiritual advancement that they care little for transforming society at large. I suspect that Barrett's fondness for the Cathars is misplaced. Like many failed groups they have the romance of the loser about them, but given their ideology, it seems likely that they would have had all the potential to have been an even more sexually repressive anti-humanist establishment than the one Europe got, and one even more indifferent to the suffering of the poor.

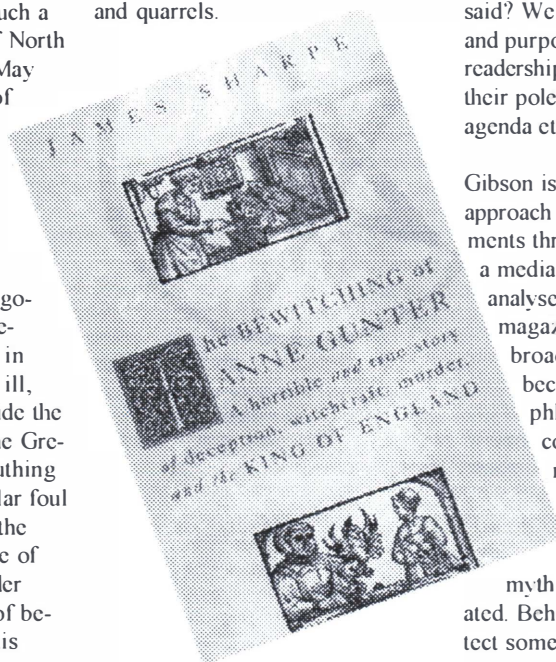
James Sharpe. *The bewitching of Anne Gunter: a horrible and true story of football, witchcraft, murder and the King of England*. Profilebooks, 1999. £16.99.

As James Sharpe says, it is probably only in England that a witchcraft case could start with a football match, but it was just such a match, held in the village of North Moreton in Oxfordshire in May 1598 that started the chain of events which led to these accusations. There, Brian Gunter, a local gentleman, intervened in a brawl and was accused of dealing fatal blows to two of the sons of another local family the Gregorys. This led to bad blood between the families, so when in 1604 his daughter Anne fell ill, Brian decided it might provide the opportunity to get back at the Gregorys who had been badmouthing him. He accused an unpopular foul tongued daughter-in-law of the Gregory family, and a couple of local beggar women (the elder with the reputation already of being a witch) of bewitching his daughter.

To keep things going Brian coached Anne in tricks to play, and gave her an unpleasant green liquid which made her feel ill. She learned additional tricks from various tracts on witchcraft that visitors and friends had given to the family to help them cope with the situation. Many were taken in, but others were sceptical, including the judges at the trial and King James I. Anne eventually confessing to her trickery.

That is the bare bones of this story, but what strikes me is the number of modern resonances. We are clearly dealing here with something on the borderline between Munchausen's syndrome and Munchausen's syndrome by proxy, a fraud born out of complex family dynamics. In the accounts of Anne vomiting pins and her stockings and bodice which would unaccountably loosen themselves, and the willingness of many of the witnesses to want to see the supernatural, are there not echoes of more modern poltergeist stories, usually with young people at the centre? And are not the tracts about famous witchcraft trials not the forerunner of today's confessional TV programmes, and witness support groups? The fact that the mass media are already a major factor as early as the start of

the 17th century is a very important point, with ramifications across a whole variety of traditions. Also important is Sharpe's instance that in Britain at least witchcraft accusations were not imposed from above but were born out of the dynamics of village life and quarrels.



Marion Gibson. *Reading Witchcraft: stories of early English witches*. Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1999. £14.99.

Marion Gibson begins by asking which are the true elements of a story that can be summarised as follows: A young woman out begging meets a peddler and asks to buy some pins, but the peddler would not sell her any, whereupon a black dog appeared to the girl and asked what she wanted to him to do the peddler. "What can you do", asks the girl, so the dogs says he can lame him the pedder. So the girl says "Lame him" and the peddler becomes lame. This is part of the confession of one of the Pendle witches, Alison Devise as reported in a book *The Wonderful Discoverie of Witches in the Countie of Lancaster*, by Thomas Potts, a clerk of the court. Did Alison meet a dog, did she imagine it spoke to her, did she hallucinate it, did Alison meet the peddler, was she a beggar and so forth?

Gibson argues that what look like simple stories often turn out to be very complex affairs, with multiple authorship, and multiple layers of interpretation. For example, are alleged words spoken by participants in the trials actually the words they used, and if so, are they repeated verbal formulae?

Are they responding to questions, if so which and in what circumstances? Or are words being put into their mouths, and if that is so by who, and for what purpose? And how far do these words in some sense represent the gist of what might actually have been said? We must examine the nature and purpose of documents, the readership they were intended for, their polemical and propagandistic agenda etc.

In other words, Marion Gibson is arguing that we should approach these historical documents through the sort of lens that a media studies student might analyse modern newspaper and magazine reports or TV broadcasts. This is appropriate because these sorts of pamphlets, broadsheets and court reports were the mass media of their day (see Jim Sharpe's book above), and it was through them that the myth of witchcraft was generated. Behind them we can also detect something of the voice of the community.

While Marion Gibson is primarily concerned with advising historians on how to approach and analyse specific documents, and therefore of necessity her arguments can become rather technical, it is clear that many of her points can be applied to more contemporary supernatural memorates. I have argued this on a number of occasions in the pages of *Magonia*. Modern 'reports' have the same problem of multiple layers of authorship and interpretation, the putting of 'appropriate' words into peoples mouths, and recounting events in a neatened 'how it should have been' fashion.

This sort of critical 'close reading' tends to be dismissed as 'literary criticism', by those who forget that all such accounts, whether of 17th century trials, or modern close encounters are in effect literary narratives, and that attempts to construct a 'science' of UFOs or lake monsters is as fundamentally absurd as a 17th century attempt to construct a science of talking dogs and loquacious ferrets. This response today brings the sort of condescending reply that Jerome Clark gave to David Clarke, on the lines of 'my dear young sir, how dare you equate belief in extraterrestrials with folklore and fairies, don't you

know that it is a serious scientific hypothesis defended by all sorts of learned astronomers and the like'. In the 17th century the response to critics of witchcraft was just the same. It was a serious subject taken seriously by serious people as an early seventeenth century pamphleteer reminds us: "both princes (yea our owne learned and most judicious King [James I and VI]) Philosophers, Poets, Chronologers, Histroriographers, and many worthy Writers, have concurred and concluded in this; that divers impious and (atrocious) mischiefs have beene effectuated through the instruments of the Divell, by Permission of God..." From the Preface to *The Wonderful Discoverie of the Witchcrafts of Margaret and Philip Flower...*, 1619.

Well that puts the sceptics in their place then!

Teresa Moorey. *UFOs; a beginner's guide*. Hodder and Stoughton, 1999. £6.99.

The author of this little book is a 'qualified, practising counsellor and astrologer... (who) has followed the witchcraft path... and has written extensively on nature worship and astrology'. Exactly how this qualifies her to write on UFOs isn't exactly clear, and while she strives to be open minded her knowledge of the subject is obviously very sketchy. This is, perhaps, why, of the 108 pages of text (minus the odd illustration or two) 20 are devoted to Roswell and 14 to the Philadelphia experiment nonsense. There are also the now obligatory references to animal mutilations and Zachariah Sitchin. Anything but a rounded introduction.

Peter J. Morris. *Aliens amongst us: a beginner's guide*. Hodder and Stoughton, 1999. £6.99.

Another thin book in the same series, again with a New Age handle, and a set of 'practical exercises' to help you contact aliens through meditation and other things new agers like, though the author never makes it entirely clear whether he considers the aliens to be real physical beings or in some sense products of the human imagination. Better than the Theresa Mooney though, as Morris does know something of the subject.

Jenny Randles, Andy Roberts and David Clarke. *The UFOs That Never Were*. London House, 2000. £16.99.

This is an important book taking a critical look at some of the major British UFOs of the last 30 years. But an opening chapter on the 1897 airship by David Clarke may be the most important, showing how folklore, hoaxes, and expectancy create UFO waves.

Of the major British cases discussed, three are included here because of their promotion as UFO crashes rather than being on the face of it typical UFO events. These are the 'phantom plane crashes' at the Isle of Lewis in October 1996, Howden Moor, March 1997 (basically a version of Dave Clarke's article in *Magonia* 71) and the Berwyn Mountain affair of January 1974. Clarke concludes that the Lewis incident was a large bolide, whereas at Howden he preferred a light aircraft plus jets breaking the sound barrier.

The solution to Howden Moor may revolve around whether the witnesses who claimed to see a flash and plumes of smoke were mistaken or not. If not, then it seems as though Howden also may have been a large bolide exploding at high altitude, but if seismic readings of the noise rule out that in favour of sonic booms at lower altitude, then the 'flash and smoke' would seem to be hallucinations brought on by expectancy and closure (the brain interprets the bangs as explosions and provides the flash and smoke which go with explosions).

I had started to take an interest in the Berwyn Mountain affair recently, not because I thought of crashed saucers but was beginning to wonder if that represented the high altitude explosion of a small asteroid, with the earthquake reported at the time really being an atmospheric shock wave. From Andy Roberts' researches it seems that there was a coincidence between an earthquake that seismographs reported as being at six miles depth, and the presence of bolides and some nefarious rural activities that same night.

None of these three stories appeared to be obvious UFO stories, yet each became converted by ufological fantasists into incredible tales of crashed flying saucers, or shot-down aircraft, with mysterious secrets. In the

case of Berwyn, Andy Roberts also shows that events which happened years apart became conflated in the tales.

Another case which featured in *Magonia* was the Cracoe Fell UFO photograph which turned out to be the sun reflecting on rocks.

Again we see how ufologists convert ordinary if unusual events into spectacular mysteries.

A more spectacular case to start with was the Peter Day film, now known to show burning fuel jettisoned from an F-111 fighter in terminal trouble, but which for a long time appeared to be in the upper 1% of genuinely puzzling cases, and we hear of Doctor Hynck waffling on about mysterious force fields, to account for blurring caused by movement of the camera. In many ways the Peter Day film is the most important IFO here. Its demolition suggests that almost any case can be explained given sufficient time and trouble.

Sometimes the *really* impenetrable mysteries are those of human motivation. One such is that of Alex Birch and his on-off claims to have hoaxed his 1962 UFO photos. Though Clarke and Roberts appear rather baffled as to just which story is true, there is no real doubt. In his 1972 statement Birch didn't just make a vague confession, he actually demonstrated exactly how he had done it on a TV documentary, complete with the glass plate on which the 'UFOs' were painted. There is at least a 99.99% certainty that this picture was a hoax. What does that then say about Birch's claims for a lifetime of paranormal experiences? There seem to be two areas of explanation: one is that these experiences were at least subjectively real and Birch faked the photo to make them public and concrete; the other is that Birch's claims to amazing powers are themselves part of a fantasy narrative. If that were the case, there is no shortage of material in the pub-

lic domain from which such stories could be constructed, and we may be dealing with fantathesia, with its confusion between external and internal stimuli, or the narrational fantasy of Caraboo

Syndrome, or some mixture of the two.

This is by no means a unique case, Clarke and Roberts refer to the Cottingley Two, and there have been numerous cases of clearly fraudulent mediums narrating tales of a lifetime of psychic experience. The closest parallel however is with Stephen

Darbyshire and his cousin who in 1954 produced photographs whose similarity to the then much trumpeted Adamski photographs caused glee among ufologists. Every so often ufologists interview him and he continues to insist that the photos aren't faked. Derbyshire's story also has the strange element of enchantment, in that the boys claimed a mysterious impulse made them go up the 'Old Man of Coniston'. Birch's and Derbyshire's stories have other points of similarity as well, such as the claim that Earl Mountbatten and/or the Duke of Edinburgh were interested in their tales.

There is a chapter on the UFO wave of 1987, which I suspect takes the claims of Tim Matthews about amazing secret aircraft too seriously, but the largest piece in the book is Jenny Randles' penultimate stage in discarding Rendlesham. She still tries to cling on to the mystery with her fingertips, by going on about mysterious mind-altering radar experiments, but you can hear the slipping fingernails grating against the rocks. New evidence uncovered by James Easton more or less demonstrates that the principle witnesses actually saw the light-house at Orford Ness. Their stories have grown over the years, but as I pointed out before in a review, the alleged field effects and perceptual distortions which Jenny hints were caused by nefarious experiments are actually quite accurate descrip-

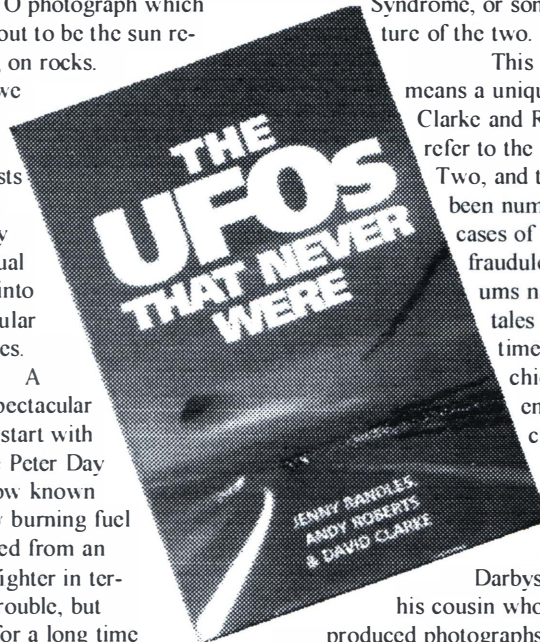
tions of the effects of extreme fear and stress.

There may be other factors in perceptual distortion: the effects of flashing point sources of light for example which may in certain people generate alternated states of consciousness. Then again local rumours picked up by Probe/SCUFORI suggested that, how shall we put it, an over-enthusiastic getting into the seasonal spirit may have been a contributing factor.

Jenny calls this chapter 'Rendle Shame', which perhaps prompts the question, whose shame is it? Certainly not Probe/SCUFORI who investigated the case very soon afterwards, and came to the conclusion that there was nothing much to it, a conclusion also reached by Kevin McClure. Their comments make it clear that the 'investigation' by Street and Butler was a textbook example of how not to investigate a case taken to nth degree.

Members of Probe/SCUFORI were so disgusted by the later promotion of Rendlesham that several left the subject entirely, not however before revealing some of its background to Roger Sandell and John Rimmer at a BUFORA meeting on the case, and providing points which Roger incorporated in his review of *Skyrash*. These points have been reiterated by one of the original investigators, who in several conversations with myself, and over a period of years separately to John and Roger presented some interesting and amusing background which the libel laws prevent being discussed.

I hope that this book at least will turn the tide and perhaps start a habit of actually publishing the results of case investigations, rather than leaving them to moulder in files. To answer perhaps somewhat legitimate complaints that many of the cases in this book were intrinsically weak, perhaps a case-by-case review of the really puzzling cases, if any, is needed: those CEIII and CEIV we used to read about, but never seem to encounter these days. No vague talk of UAPs and fields and so, just a real mainstream-science attempt to find out what is going on. I wager if that is done with the energy that Dave Clarke and Andy Roberts can muster, very little will be unexplained at the end. Perhaps nothing





Hold the Back Page

Nothing to gain?

In discussions on the possible subjective nature of the abduction experience the point is often made by proponents of the ETH or some other external explanation, that abductions are such traumatic experiences that no one would fantasise them, or willingly put themselves through the alleged ordeals of being investigated unless their reported experiences had some basis in reality.

Two recent cases in Britain challenge the very limited views of hoaxes which seem to be held by some researchers.

There was shock and outrage earlier this year when Chris Barton, a black teenager from a village in Oxfordshire reported that he had been sprayed with petrol from a car by four white youths, who had then stopped and surrounded the boy, made racist insults and set fire to his clothes. Pictures of the severely disfigured 17-year-old confirmed his story.

In a second case financial advisor Chris Cotter was stabbed in the back and cut across his face in an alleged racist attack, apparently provoked by his relationship with his former girlfriend Ashia Hansen, a black athlete who is likely to be a member of Britain's Olympic squad in the Sydney games. Hansen also received a series of threatening racist letters.

Both these cases provoked outrage, with public figures making statements about the prevalence of violent racism in Britain. However, both these cases turn out to have been hoaxes. In the Chris Barton case three people, including "a seventeen-year-old youth" were arrested on suspicion of committing criminal damage. Thames Valley police say they are "now of the opinion that the attack never occurred."

In the Cotter case, Cotter and two other men have been charged with perverting the course of justice and conspiracy to obtain

financial gain by deception by selling the story to the newspapers.

Now presumably in the latter case the people involved did "have something to gain" through selling the story, but it is not at all clear what the motivation was in the Barton case. Whatever the motivations however, these cases demonstrate yet again that people will undergo considerable trauma, both physical and mental and will subject themselves to intense pressure and investigation for reasons with at best obscure and at worst criminal. And it is only because these cases involved criminality and were subjected to the full rigors of a police investigation that the truth emerged.

Maybe sceptics who urge that abduction experiences should be regarded as analogous to criminal attacks may not be far from the truth. Perhaps if abductions were subjected to the type of investigation that a criminal assault would involve more cases would be revealed as fabrications prompted by obscurely convoluted motives.

Pelicanitis

An admirer (?) of the Pelican submits this limerick:

"What a wondrous bird is the pelican
Its beak holds more than its belly can
A marvellous sight
In supersonic flight
As it flits round the peaks of Washington"

Stole the Back Page

We were shocked to open the *ES* magazine which comes with Friday night's London *Evening Standard* when a few weeks ago we found lurking at the rear was a new regular column written, it would seem, by a different writer each week, called 'Hold the Back Page'. We are appalled at this blatant plagiarism of the long established and respected *Magonia* feature. M'learned friends are on the case!

Something's Up.

News comes through of the latest difficulties suffered by John Hutchison, British Columbia's levitation expert. "Gun wielding police", we are told handcuffed Hutchison then searched his apartment following an anonymous complaint that firearms had been brought in. In 1978 antique firearms had been seized from Hutchison, and returned two years later. An 'electrical inspector' was called in to examine the famous 'Poltergeist Machine' (*Magonia's, passim*) and more sinisterly 'men in suits' (I don't know how uncommon this is in British Columbia, presumably not everyone dresses like lumberjacks) took photographs of Mr Hutchison's Strange Device. To prove they were sinister Hutchison claims they had an 'official air' about them - maybe it was their after-shave.

In the circles in which we move all this is necessarily evidence of a conspiracy, which seems to involve former Canadian Prime Ministers Pierre Trudeau and Brian Mulroney. The latter ordered the 'forcible seizure' of Hutchison's first laboratory in 1990, which is still held by the Canadian Government. Judging by the videos we have seen of the equipment in operation in an apartment in a residential block, this would seem to be a sensible health and safety precaution.

The most recent raid follows a 'successful levitation' on 11 October 1999, which was videotaped. We're on our way to Blockbusters now, to order it. It seems neighbours across the street called the police to complain about his experiment, although our report says, "there is no way known at this time that they could have been aware of the levitation experiment in progress". Perhaps when they found their basement was now on the third floor they realised something was wrong?